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ABSTRACT

A learning module about intercultural communications which is process-oriented, stresses experiential learning, and has listed performance objectives is described. The module's topics, objectives, activities, and course requirements are listed, and a list of instructional resources are included. The module is aimed at college students. (JK)

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A LEARNING MODULE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

by

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Intercultural training activities have, during the past many years, been undertaken by various government and educational agencies in the form of short-term interaction workshops and/or human relations groups. It has been only recently that Intercultural Communication has received recognition as a field of study at the college and university level. In 1969, Jean Marie Ackerman, then at the California State Polytechnic College, proposed a course entitled "Cultural Perspectives" which was primarily designed to help students understand their own and other cultures and, especially, to work abroad effectively. In 1971, Paul Pedersen of the University of Minnesota proposed a graduate level course in "International and Intercultural Dimensions of Counselling". Later, in the same year, Winston Brembeck (University of Wisconsin) compiled a comprehensive list of "Potential Units for a Syllabus for a Course in Intercultural Communication (3)."

The Learning Module in Intercultural Communication, described in the following pages, was developed and taught by the author at the Governors State University in the winter of 1971. The participants in the module were advanced undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the College of Human Learning and Development and the College of Cultural Studies. The module provided an ongoing interaction among the students

and the instructors. As a result, some of the objectives were redefined and reformulated to take into account the specific needs and interests of students.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

A basic assumption underlying the design of the module is that culture provides its members with a set of assumptions and values about themselves and that these assumptions and values serve as the context within members of one culture group relate to the members of other culture groups. To facilitate meaningful communication, one must not only learn the cultural code, but also the communication code, i.e., the ways in which the behavior patterns communicate meaning.

Three distinguishing features of the module deserve mention here. These are:

1. Process - orientedness

The proposed module is, by design, not culture-bound and, therefore, not confined to the study of communication among members of specified cultures. Rather, the emphasis is on the understanding of the basic process and principles which facilitate or obstruct the flow of communication among members of various culture groups.

2. Experiential Learning

Much of the material covered in this module is designed to enable the student to gain new insights about himself and his current relationships with people from other culture groups. However, mere cognitive

realization or theoretical knowledge on the part of the student is not adequate. He is, therefore, encouraged to actually experience a variety of intercultural interaction situations. The learning experiences so achieved provide the student with insights about how cognitive information can be made personally applicable to him.

3. Performance Objectives

The core content of the module is described in terms of performance objectives. Performance Objectives - also designated as Behavioral Objectives- are "statements which describe what student will be able to do after completing a prescribed unit of instruction (Kibler et. al., 1970)". The break-up of the module-content in performance objectives helps communicate the goals of instructional units to students, and maximizes the efficiency with which all students fulfill specified objectives.

MODULE DESCRIPTION

Rationale

Interaction among persons belonging to different culture groups is become increasingly common as efforts toward social, political and economic integration become more frequent. The literature concerned with stereotyping, interpersonal attitudes, and behavior in culturally heterogenous groups suggests that interaction acorss cultural barriers produces substantial difficulties.

This learning module in Intercultural Communication is an attempt to understand the complex process by which people belonging to different culture gruops communicate, or fail to communicate, with each other.

Description

The nature and process of Culture and Communication will be examined. Major topics will be the relation of a person's perception of environment and his communication behavior, the influence of culture on perception, the influence of cognitive differences on communication between different cultures, the nature and process of stereotype formation, and the effect of stereotyping on interpersonal and intercultural communications.

Performance Objectives

1. Student will understand the nature and concept of culture and will recognize certain universal features common to all cultures.

2. Student will become aware of the influence of culture on perception.
3. Student will examine Communication as a Process and become familiar with various models of communication.
4. Student will become aware of the similarities and differences between the processes of Interpersonal Communication and Intercultural Communication.
5. Student will examine the influence of cognitive differences between groups on communication between members of those groups.
6. Student will demonstrate an understanding of the nature and process of stereotype formation and how stereotypes edit and control our communications.
7. Student will understand the relationship between dialects and communication between the speakers of those dialects.
8. Student will examine the relationship between symbols and culture.
9. Student will examine non-verbal dimensions of communication and understand how study of facial expressions, body movements and gestures of other cultures can facilitate intercultural communication.

10. Student will become aware of the relationship between moral values and communication.
11. Student will examine the effect of culture on modes of communication.
12. Student will participate in various interaction situations involving members of different culture-groups.

Learning Activities

At the initial meeting of all students enrolled in the module, the objectives of the module will be discussed and, if necessary, revised to take into account specific individual needs and interests. At this meeting, students will also select topics and dates for their class presentations. The presentation and the following discussion would normally take one hour; therefore two presentations can be made each week. In addition to the presentation, students will have an opportunity to write a paper on an objective not covered by their individual presentations.

The students interested in examining their modes of inter-cultural interactions will meet weekly with the coordinator in a small group composed of people from three or more diverse cultures. In addition (or in lieu of it) they may meet in an intensive 12 hour session where, among other things, an attempt will be made to simulate intercultural communication settings through role-playing.

Assessment

Class presentation, writing of a satisfactory term paper, meeting weekly in a group and participation in the twelve hour session will each

constitute one unit load. Students will have freedom to choose one or more of these four components in any combitation they desire to meet their unit requirements. At the end of the session they will have an opportunity of taking an oral, written or take - home examination to establish competencies in particular objectives for transcript purposes.

Instructional Resources

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